



Embassy of the United States of America

Samoilova 21
1000 Skopje
Tel: (+389 2) 310 2000
consularskopje@state.gov
<http://macedonia.usembassy.gov>

American Citizen Services Newsletter March 2010

Safety and Security Situation	1
Upcoming Embassy Holidays	2
Want to be a Warden for the U.S. Embassy?	2
New Law Makes Absentee Voting Easier for Overseas Americans	3
Tips for Traveling Abroad	4
Department of State Travel Information	5
U.S. Tax Information Resources	6
U.S. Customs and Border Protection Global Entry Program	6

SAFETY AND SECURITY SITUATION

We reiterate the State Department's Country Specific Information on Macedonia: The security situation in Macedonia is stable, although occasional criminal violence does occur. U.S. citizens should avoid areas with demonstrations, strikes, or roadblocks where large crowds are gathered, particularly those involving political causes or striking workers. Crime in Macedonia is low by U.S. standards, and violent crime against U.S. citizens is rare. Pick-pocketing, theft, and other petty street crimes do occur, however, particularly in areas where tourists and foreigners congregate. U.S. citizens are advised to take the same precautions against becoming crime victims as they would in any U.S. city. Valuables, including cell phones and electronic items, should not be left in plain view in unattended vehicles. Windows and doors should be securely locked when residences are not occupied. Organized crime is present in Macedonia; organized criminal activity occasionally results in violent confrontations between members of rival organizations. ATM use is generally safe; however, travelers should take standard safety precautions.

The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If you are a victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to the local police, please contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance. The Embassy/Consulate staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, to contact family members or friends, and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and find an attorney if needed.

The Worldwide Caution issued for U.S. citizens abroad by the U.S. Department of State regarding the threat of terrorist acts has been updated as of February 12, 2010. For the latest security information, U.S. citizens traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's website at <http://travel.state.gov>, where up-to-date [Worldwide Caution Public Announcements](#), [Travel Warnings](#) and [Public Announcements](#) can be found.

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS

The Embassy will be closed for the following holidays:

- Orthodox Easter – Sunday, observed on Monday, April 5
- Labor Day –Saturday, May 1, Day of observance not yet announced
- Saint Cyril and Methodius Day – Monday, May 24
- Memorial Day – Monday, May 31

WANT TO BE A WARDEN FOR THE U.S. EMBASSY?

What is a 'Warden'?

A private U.S. citizen resident in a host country, who volunteers to assist consular sections in disaster preparedness, welfare & whereabouts and alerting U.S. citizens to emergency situations.

Besides providing emergency information, wardens have an important role to play in:

- Providing updates about the situation in their district
- Assisting/encouraging the registration of newcomers
- Assisting in a crisis; for example natural disasters, civil unrest
- Alerting U.S. citizens without immediate e-mail or Internet access to emergency situations

Some wardens also provide other services:

- Prison and hospital visits as a first responder while a consular official travels to a remote location
- Welfare/Whereabouts assistance in locating a U.S. citizen or determining the status of a U.S. citizen
- Wardens often have excellent contacts in their neighborhood or local community

Each U.S. post abroad has a network of volunteers in the community who live, work, study, or socialize with large groups of U.S. citizens. These volunteers, called "wardens" – aptly named after WWII air raid wardens – help us spread messages to the American community. Because of their close ties to the U.S. expat community, wardens are often the fastest and most effective route to distributing information to U.S. citizens. Embassy wardens are often unseen, but they nevertheless play an integral role in assisting U.S. citizens living abroad.

If you are interested in registering to become a warden, or want more information, please send us an email at skopjeacsmailbox@state.gov

NEW LAW MAKES ABSENTEE VOTING EASIER FOR OVERSEAS AMERICANS

On October 28, 2009, Congress enacted the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act. This legislation amends existing law regarding overseas voting in federal elections, and should make voting easier for overseas Americans.

New Procedures for 2010 Elections

Beginning with the November 2010 general election, and for all subsequent general, special, and primary elections, states will be required to mail out ballots at least 45 days prior to an election for a federal office. This requirement may cause some states to select earlier primary dates in order to comply with the 45 day mailing deadline, or to request waivers due to special circumstances.

In addition to mailing ballots to overseas voters, the states will be required, at the voter's request, to provide registration forms, absentee ballot request forms, and blank ballots via fax or email. However, each state's laws determine whether ballot requests or voted ballots can be returned via fax or email. The new law prohibits states from rejecting marked ballots based on notarization, paper size, or paper weight requirements. The witnessing requirements of individual states remain in place.

Overseas Absentee Ballot Requests

Effective immediately, states will no longer be required by federal law to continue to mail election materials to overseas addresses (even when they are determined to be invalid) for two complete general election cycles on the basis of a single ballot request. It will now be up to each state to determine how long to continue to send out election materials before requiring overseas voters to submit new ballot requests. This change, sought by local election officials, should greatly decrease the volume of voting materials sent abroad to addresses where Americans no longer reside.

State Department Recommendations

In light of these changes, the Department of State recommends that all U.S. voters residing abroad request absentee ballots from their local election officials at the start of each calendar year, and whenever there is a change of address, change of e-mail address, or change of name, by completing and sending in a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). To locate information on your specific state's requirements, and to obtain an on-line version of the FPCA, please visit www.fvap.gov. Voters may also pick up a hard copy of the FPCA from any U.S. embassy or consulate. FPCAs may be mailed to your local voting officials in the United States via international mail or from any U.S. embassy or consulate. Many states allow U.S. citizens overseas to submit the FPCA by e-mail or fax.

The Department of State strongly encourages all U.S. overseas voters to provide email addresses or fax numbers on their FPCAs to enable local election officials to transmit election materials in the fastest manner available, which should then allow sufficient time for the return of voted ballots. For information regarding your specific state, please visit www.fvap.gov.

Emergency Ballots

The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) serves as an emergency ballot for the November general elections for federal offices, although some states also permit its use for

elections for state and local offices. Beginning in January 2011, the new law allows use of the FWAB for primary, special, and runoff elections for federal offices. Voters who request an absentee ballot in advance of their state's ballot request deadline, but who fail to receive an official ballot from local election officials in time to vote, should complete the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot and send it back to local election officials in time for it to be counted. An on-line version of the FWAB, together with instructions for its use, is available at www.fvap.gov.

Questions?

The Voting Assistance Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Skopje is also always available to answer questions about absentee voting. To contact the Voting Assistance Officer, call (02) 310-2000 or send an e-mail to VoteSkopje@state.gov.

TIPS FOR TRAVELING ABROAD

For detailed information about steps you can take to ensure a safe trip, see [How to Have a Safe Trip](#). Meanwhile, here are some quick tips to make your travel easier and safer:

❑ **Register your trip so the State Department can better assist you in an emergency:**

Register your travel plans with the State Department through a free online service at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the U.S., or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts will not be released to others without your express authorization.

❑ **Sign your passport, and fill in the emergency information:** Make sure you have a signed, valid passport, and a visa, if required, and fill in the emergency information page of your passport.

❑ **Leave copies of itinerary and passport data page:** Leave copies of your itinerary, passport data page and visas with family or friends, so you can be contacted in case of an emergency and always make sure you email the same documents to your own email account which is accessible anywhere in the world.

❑ **Check your overseas medical insurance coverage:** Ask your medical insurance company if your policy applies overseas, and if it covers emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. If it does not, consider supplemental insurance.

❑ **Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws:** While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. The State Department web site at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html has useful safety and other information about the countries you will visit.

❑ **Take precautions to avoid being a target of crime:** To avoid being a target of crime, do not wear conspicuous clothing or jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of money. Also, do not leave unattended luggage in public areas and do not accept packages from strangers.

❑ **Contact us in an emergency:** Consular personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and in the U.S. are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens. Contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates appears on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at <http://travel.state.gov>. If your passport is lost or

stolen, you should wait until the next business day to call us. Also note that the Office of Overseas Citizen Services in the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs may be reached for assistance with emergencies at 1-888-407-4747, if calling from the U.S. or Canada, or 202-501-4444, if calling from overseas.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE TRAVEL INFORMATION

Travel Alerts are issued to disseminate information about short-term conditions, generally within a particular country, that pose imminent risks to the security of U.S. citizens. Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, coups, anniversaries of terrorist events, election-related demonstrations or violence, and high profile events such as international conferences or regional sports events are examples of conditions that might generate a Travel Alert.

Travel Warnings are issued to describe long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable. A Travel Warning is also issued when the U.S. Government's ability to assist American citizens is constrained due to the closure of an embassy or consulate or because of a drawdown of staff in a specific country.

Country Specific Information is available for every country of the world. These pages include such information as location of the U.S. embassy or consulate in that particular country, unusual immigration practices, health conditions, unusual currency and entry regulations, crime and security information, and drug penalties.

You can access [Country Specific Information](#), [Travel Warnings](#) and [Travel Alerts](#) 24-hours a day in several ways.

Internet

The most convenient source of information about travel and consular services is the Consular Affairs home page. The web site address is <http://travel.state.gov>.

Telephone

Overseas Citizens Services (OCS) at 1-888-407-4747 can answer general inquiries on safety and security overseas. This number is available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays). Callers who are unable to use toll-free numbers, such as those calling from overseas, can obtain information and assistance from OCS during these hours by calling 1-202-501-4444.

In Person

Country Specific Information, Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts are available at any of the regional passport agencies and U.S. embassies and consulates abroad.

Local Laws and Customs

When you leave the United States, you are subject to the laws of the country you are visiting. Therefore, before you go, learn as much as you can about the local laws and customs of the places you plan to visit. Good resources are your library, your travel agent, and the embassies, consulates or tourist bureaus of the countries you will visit. In addition, keep track of what is being reported in the media about recent developments in those countries.

U.S. TAX INFORMATION RESOURCES

Income tax season is fast approaching. We recommend that you obtain your tax forms online at <http://www.irs.gov/formspubs/index.html>. Please note that the IRS has just released the latest comprehensive guide for your 2009 taxes called Publication 17. You can read all about it and download it here: <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=216665,00.html>.

For more information on U.S. taxes, please consult the list of websites and telephone numbers below to help find the forms and answers you need.

Main IRS website: www.irs.gov

Tax guidance for U.S. citizens abroad:

<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=97324,00.html>

Tax guidance for persons in the military: <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/military/index.html>

Electronic payment website: <http://www.eftps.gov/>

Refund information: <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96596,00.html?portlet=4>

Phone Services:

Individuals	1-800-829-1040
Businesses	1-800-829-4933
Customer Service Phone Number	1-215-516-2000
Refund Inquiries	1-800-829-4477
TeleTax	1-800-829-4477
ITINs after 6 weeks	1-800-829-1040
Exempt Organization Help Desk	1-877-829-5500
Tax Offset Program (TOP) Help Desk	1-800-304-3107
E-Services Help Desk	1-512-416-7750

Please note that calling the above 1-800 U.S. numbers from an overseas location will usually not be toll-free.

STATE TAX RETURNS: For individual state income tax information, visit <http://www.taxadmin.org/>. The Embassy does not have state tax forms or state tax information

Taxpayer Service Specialists are available for tax assistance on U.S. income tax matters at the IRS office at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, France. More information on 2009 Tax Year Assistance can be found at <http://france.usembassy.gov/irs.html>. Their email address is IRSParis@irs.gov.

U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION GLOBAL ENTRY PROGRAM

Global Entry is a program designed by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection to expedite international air travel by allowing pre-approved travelers the use of an automated kiosk to clear passport control. This means no more waiting in line upon arrival and no forms to fill out on the plane. Participation in the Global Entry pilot is voluntary. Membership is currently limited to U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals and U.S. Legal Permanent Residents, as well as to citizens of the Netherlands via a joint arrangement known as "FLUX."

A \$100 non-refundable application fee is charged at the time of application and membership is valid for 5 years. There are Global Entry automated kiosks at airports such as Washington Dulles (IAD), Los Angeles International (LAX), John F. Kennedy (JFK), Honolulu International (HNL), and many more. Currently, 20 airports are participating in Global Entry. If you are a frequent traveler and often need additional pages in your passport, Global Entry is for you since stamping the passport is not required. For more details and to sign up for Global Entry, visit the following website:

http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/trusted_traveler/global_entry/



This newsletter is an unofficial and informal source of practical information for U.S. citizens residing in Macedonia. If you have comments, questions, or suggestions, please contact the Consular Section at (02) 310-2000, or at consularskopje@state.gov. This newsletter is also available on the American Citizens Services page of our website at <http://macedonia.usembassy.gov>